

WRITING PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS AND TASKS

A Headquarters performance appraisal plan consists of two parts: elements and standards.

Performance elements. The performance elements of a position are basic to a performance appraisal plan. Everything else in the plan flows from the performance elements. Therefore, an understanding of the term "performance elements" is necessary to the development of a good plan. The formal definition is:

A performance element is a general description of an employee's overall responsibility in a particular area of work.

Secondly, an equally clear statement of the tasks and the levels of accomplishment expected of the employee: **these are the performance standards.**

This guidance will focus on the identification of performance elements. Performance elements can be critical, non-critical, or "additional."

The Headquarters plan will call for a majority of critical elements, at least one non-critical element, and optional "additional" elements that are not calculated in arriving at the appraisal's numeric rating.

Critical Elements

Critical Element is the work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance on the element would result in a determination that an employee's overall performance is unacceptable. Such elements shall be used to measure performance only at the individual level.

Non-Critical Elements

Non-critical element is a dimension or aspect of individual, team, or organizational performance, exclusive of a critical element, that is used in assigning a summary level. Such elements may include, but are not limited to, objectives, goals, program plans, work plans, and other means of expressing expected performance.

Additional Elements

Additional performance element means a dimension or aspect of individual, team, or organizational performance that is not a critical or non-critical element. Such elements are not used in assigning a summary level but, like critical and non-critical elements, are useful for purposes such as communicating performance expectations and serving as the basis for granting awards. Such elements may include, but are not limited to, objectives, goals, program plans, work plans, and other means of expressing expected performance.

Identifying Performance Elements

First of all, performance elements must have two attributes, **consistency** and **scope**. As you respond to the factors below to determine appropriate elements, remember these two attributes:

- ◆ The performance element must be **consistent** with the overall objectives of the organization.

You should ensure that each element is working toward achieving a goal; all elements should be working toward the ultimate goal: The success of the organization for which you are responsible.

- ◆ The **scope** of the performance element should be broad enough to measure.

If an element is too narrow, it will not be worth the time and effort necessary to properly measure the results of an employee's efforts. If the scope is too broad, it will be difficult to assess because of its many components.

Now, look at the **TOOLS** you will need to determine appropriate elements: they should include the **POSITION DESCRIPTION** of the employee, the **MISSION AND FUNCTION STATEMENT** of the organization, possibly the organization's **BUDGET, STRATEGIC PLANS** and associated **ACTION PLANS**. These should be supplemented by **AUTHORIZING LEGISLATION** and **APPROPRIATIONS LEGISLATION, FINDINGS** and **REPORTS** by agencies such as the General Accounting Office, the Office of Management and Budget, the Environmental Protection Agency, the State Department, etc.

Next, look at the following **FACTORS** to identify performance elements:

- ◆ **Whether the responsibility in the position description** - An employee's position description generally contains the most important aspects of the job. If a responsibility is not reflected here, it is unlikely to be included as a performance element. If a responsibility is not in the position description but you think it should be a job element, you should probably change the position description to include it.
- ◆ **Impact of the responsibility on position classification** - The classification process takes certain responsibilities into account in determining the proper grade of a job. Normally, these are the most important portions of a position and should be listed as performance elements of a performance plan. Again, these tasks should also be reflected in the position description.
- ◆ **Whether similar positions have the same responsibilities** - Because the primary goal of the performance appraisal system is to measure performance fairly and objectively, people in similar positions should have the same or similar elements; any differences should be based on identifiable differences in work.
- ◆ **Frequency of the responsibility execution** - A job that is not performed frequently is not as likely to be a strong candidate for becoming a performance element.

- ◆ **Length of time it takes to complete the responsibility** - Ask yourself how much time of the day, week, month, etc., it would ordinarily take an employee to complete a specific responsibility; if it does not require a substantial part of the employee's time, it might not be worth measuring.
- ◆ **Whether the employee controls the outcomes of the responsibility** - It is not fair to hold the employee accountable if the outcome of the job is beyond the employee's control, and should not normally be included as a performance element.
- ◆ **Level of difficulty** - The most difficult responsibilities are normally the ones you will be most likely to include as performance elements. In most cases, this will overlap with other considerations listed above, such as the amount of time spent by the employee.
- ◆ **Potential adverse consequences** - Normally, those portions of the job that have the largest potential adverse impact on the organization will be identified as a performance element.
- ◆ **Impact on the organization** - A performance element that will have an impact on the organizations' ability to accomplish its mission or meet its goals should be included as a performance element than one that is unrelated to the goals of the organization.

You will not need to consider all of these in deciding the performance elements for every position. However, some of them will be applicable to all performance elements and, when applied with common sense, these identifying factors should help you determine what performance elements should be listed in an employee's performance plan.

Writing Performance Elements

Once the performance elements have been identified for a position, the next step is writing them. While there is no one right way to do this the following examples will be helpful.

Short Element Statement

The initial structure of a written performance element is straight-forward: It should consist of an action verb and an object. For example:

<u>Action Verb</u>	<u>Object</u>
Types	letters and memoranda
Submits	weekly reports
Trains	subordinates
Audits	travel vouchers

CRITERIA CHECKLIST FOR PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS

Position Title: _____

Name: _____

Grade: _____

Org: _____

1. Related to the organization's mission: _____Yes _____No
Is performance/execution of this element necessary for mission accomplishment?
2. Purpose/goal oriented: _____ Yes _____No
Does the element establish an "end product" or outcome that will be the consequence of performing it?
3. What would be the effect on the organization's mission if performed inadequately or if the "end product" were not produced? _____

4. Significant component of the position: _____Yes _____No
Is the "end product" central to the purpose of the position? Is it reflected in the employee's position description? If not, where?
5. Recurring aspect of the position: _____Yes _____No
Is the element a regular/recurring requirement of the position? ("One of a kind" special projects would normally not be a performance element unless such an assignment were to be a routine matter or of significant duration.)
6. Within the authority delegated to the position: _____Yes _____No
Does employee have full authority to perform this element? Does adequate performance require others to do something?
7. Is it distinguishable from other performance elements? (Watch out for elements that "leak" into other elements.) _____Yes _____No

8. Can it be broken down into other elements that _____Yes _____No
are smaller in scope? (If so, ensure that the element
is the right size for ease of measuring.)

9. Are there overlaps in accountability? Who has primary responsibility for this
element? _____

10. Does the element describe generalized _____Yes _____No
personality traits? (If so, it cannot be used)